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ABSTRACT

This paper explores ways to improve assessments of college faculty by students and ways to improve instruction in higher education. Each university should develop its own assessment form, drawing heavily on the input of instructors. It is suggested that a committee of students assess the instructor, with the committee identified for accountability purposes. Students should be required to provide evidence or documentation for the reason a certain rating was given for an item on the assessment form. If serious problems are found, the instructor should be assessed more frequently. Additional assessments could come from university colleagues of the instructor. Ways to improve university instruction could include requiring each instructor to submit a teaching plan. Workshops can be held to stress the importance of instruction, and faculty should make specific efforts to attend professional meetings. Other things that can help an instructor improve his or her performance are attending continuing education classes, doing research, and viewing videotapes of one's own instruction. Participating in team teaching, conducting clinical teaching exercises, meeting with department colleagues, and focusing on the community of learners are other steps that should improve the quality of instruction. (SLD)

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UNIVERSITY STUDENT'S ASSESSMENT OF INSTRUCTION

One procedure that has been used to assess the quality of university instruction is student evaluation of each course taken. The form used for assessment may be a standardized form. The standardized form is produced by a commercial company and student results from each course may be machine scored and the results available to the involved instructor. The results reveal different facets of an instructor's quality of instruction, such as explaining meaningfully that which was taught. A five point Lickert scale is generally used for students to appraise each item. Thus, an instructor explaining meaningfully what has been taught may receive a low rating such as a 1 or very high rating with a 5. From all students in the class, an average rating is then received for each item on the standardized form. A range may also be shown on the printout showing for each item on the standardized form, such as how many students gave a 1,2, 3, 4, or 5 rating.

On the directions for administering the end of course assessment of the university instructor's teaching, a notice is read to perspective students that the results may be used to

1. dismiss an instructor, tenured or untenured.
2. grant instructor promotion or tenure.

There is considerable fear on the instructor's part on how students will mark each item to be assessed for the course, such as in number 1 above. The author has heard comments such as the following when instructors were picking up the printout results:

1. I have to be ready to be crucified.
2. I dread looking at printout results.
3. Would I really be fired if printout results are poor and yet I am on tenure?
4. I have worked hard to try to get on tenure, but fear how students have responded.
5. I start class on time each day and yet am marked drown that I do not do so. It is frustrating!

Generally, professors do not voice positive comments about the assessments, but say that it might be a necessity to cull out incompetent instruction. One professor, only, stated that he taught well so he had nothing to fear from printout results. I think one can safely say there is fear on the instructor's part on how the assessment results will be used. Thus, a few professors have stated that this is one way to get rid of someone they, the administration, do not like. It sounds as if an arbitrary way will be devised to get rid of a professor that is not wanted by the administration. This may not be due to incompetency. There tends to be considerable mistrust on what will be done by the administration

pertaining to results from student assessments of instruction. According to the author, the following fears are involved:

1. there is no accountability from university students on how the ratings were given for each item on the assessment form. Thus, students may give any rating and not be identified.
2. a student may not read the items and give arbitrary ratings for each item in order to leave the classroom and do something else.
3. a student may mark each item as a 1 (the lowest) in order to make the instructor look bad.
4. a student may feel that the work in class has been too demanding or complex and this is a way to get even with the instructor.
5. students feel they have not had fun in the class taken.

There is a definite weakness in giving the student assessment form at the end of the semester. Thus, the instructor has little to go by for the next class to be taught in the ensuing semester. There is then a lack of validity is using the assessment results from the class completed to the new students to be taught. Actually, the assessment should be given approximately one month after the class has been in operation, so that the results from students may be used to improve the curriculum. Thus, the instructor may notice weak areas as checked by students and use the results to make necessary changes in instruction for the rest of the semester. External validity is then in evidence due to the same students taught during the entire semester, using student assessment results.

Edwards (2000, 539) summarizes research on using student ratings of professors on the university level of instruction. These include the following:

1. it hinders relationships between instructors and students. Students assess instructors based on anticipated grades to be received.
2. low grades given to students might make for poor ratings of instructional quality.
3. lower grades given to students may make for lower class size and eventual loss of jobs due to students avoiding these lower grading professors.
4. it is not in the economic interests of instructors to give low grades to students in class.
5. faculty may use student evaluation results by giving higher grades to enhance their status and avoid doing a good job of teaching.

Improving Student Assessments

Each university should develop their very own assessment form for student use. Instructor input should be heavy since they will be assessed by students. The school of education may want a separate form from that of others on the university campus. The items then could be

more applicable to the education of teachers. It might even be that those preparing elementary school teachers would want a separate assessment form from those preparing middle school/high school teachers. Why? A high school teacher needs to posses much knowledge of subject matter to be taught whereas a primary grade teacher needs more emphasis placed upon the psychology of instruction and how to work with young people.

Second, a committee of students should assess an instructor in the class being taken. With the instructor preset, the committee then is identified by name to be accountable for decisions made. The instructor has a chance to provide data on meeting selected standards. Students would need to provide evidence or documentation on why a certain rating was given for an item on the assessment form. Thus, if the instructor's test items were given a poor rating, the multiple choice test items, for example, cold be viewed, discussed, and assistance given, if necessary, for improvement. Thus, the students assessing the instructor are known by name and the instructor may see evidence of what is being criticized, and hopefully, what is to be praised. No one is perfect, but all need to move in the direction of some ideal. Improved instruction should definitely be an end goal.

Third, if there are serious weak matters of instruction, the assessment may be given more frequently. Assessment results may then be provided to the instructor to notice if improvement is on the way and forthcoming. Should no instructor be dismissed? The answer is that there are cases whereby an instructor's tenure should be terminated. This is true in all professions, be it medicine or law.

Further, assessments may come from colleagues who are university instructors. Definite, clear standards need to be developed for the assessment project. Vague, hazy criteria need to be eliminated. It is important to document what is being criticized of an instructor's instruction. Heresay and gossip have no place in the assessment project. Evidence needs to be obtained pertaining to the quality of instruction. Factors such as the following need to be taken into consideration when desiring a fair, honest assessment:

1. hostility toward a faculty member. Those who are hostile toward an instructor should not be involved in the assessment of that individual.

2. extremely close friendships. It is good to have excellent human relations, but very close friends may not provide the needed assessment data for instructional improvement.

3. needed inservice education for instructors so that ratings are as objective as possible. Perfect objectivity, however, is not possible since each person has feelings and values.

4. the concept of interscorer or interrater reliability being advocated. If instructors are far apart on rating a behavior such as "treats students with respect," averaging the ratings may mean nothing.

Thus, if five instructors each provide a rating of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively, there is absolutely no evidence on how well an instructor is doing in achieving that criteria to be rated.

5. a study of which criteria used during instruction make for an excellent instructor; those agreed upon criteria provide standards on assessing the quality of instruction of university professors.

Edwards (2000, 545.) wrote the following:

Finally, it is recommended that colleges eliminate student evaluations of faculty . Instead, groups of two or more instructors could devote time to helping one another improve their performance. Such two or three cohorts are far more likely to enhance teacher's abilities than student's assessments, and the plethora of problems associated with student evaluations could be avoided. Colleges should also change their easy withdrawal procedures and require students to complete difficult courses...

Eliminating grade inflation and promoting quality education are imperatives for schools at all levels. The adverse affects of grade inflation are far too pervasive and devastating to to allow this practice to go unchallenged.

Plans to Improve University Instruction

There are plans in the offing that can certainly improve university instruction to emphasize quality. Each instructor might submit a plan for the ensuing school year to enhance the quality of instruction. The plan may incorporate reading journal articles and reviewing university level teacher education books to improve instructional endeavors. The writings may be summarized and one copy kept by the instructor for immediate reference for improving instruction.

Second, a series of workshops may be participated in which would stress improving university instruction. The workshop needs to have clearly established relevant objectives of instruction. Large group, committee endeavors, and individual study should be in the offing. Thus, there are problem areas for all participants to consider in university instruction. Also, small groups or committees may engage in problem solving activities pertaining to teaching on the higher education level, as well as individual concerns that an instructor might have in the instructional arena. What is stressed in the workshop may be tried out in the classroom with feedback reported to workshop participants.

Third, professional meetings need to be attended. For example, the National Council for the Social Studies, the National Council Teachers of Mathematics, and the National Science Teachers Association have annual conventions for all levels of instruction. Many of the sessions truly have outstanding content presented. These are

highly recommendable in order to improve instruction in higher education. There are also regional conferences as well as state conventions for each subject matter area. The author has found state and regional conventions/meetings to also have numerous outstanding sessions devoted to instructional improvement. Ideas gleaned from attendance may be assessed and used in classroom teaching.

Fourth, attending university class sessions in one's area of expertise may be very fulfilling. The courses taken may be at the local university or a more distant place. They may lead to a degree or the classes may be taken for post graduate studies. A journal should be kept of salient ideas encountered, along with the regular class notes. The journal entries may indicate how these ideas gleaned will be used in university instruction. Curriculum improvement should always be a key item to keep in mind while pursuing graduate course work.

Fifth, doing research is a good way to enrich the self as well as build self efficacy for curricular improvement. The research may involve a descriptive survey, correlational studies, and/or experimental studies. Recommended procedures should be used in conducting research so that the results have use and utilitarian values. Topics for doing research should relate to one's field of specialization in university instruction. They need to deal with relevant topics and the results published so that others may assess and also benefit from the research results.

Sixth, viewing and assessing one's own video-taped teaching can be an excellent way of instructional improvement. A colleague may be invited to view the tapes and offer suggestions for improved teaching of university classes. Assessments need to be done in terms of recommended criteria. Research conducted on what makes for good teaching on the university level may be used as criteria to assess one's own instructional prowess.

Seventh, team teaching can be an excellent approach to inservice education, providing team members are compatible. Thus, good human relations need to prevail in all relations between and among faculty members. The team, not an individual, plans the objectives, learning opportunities to achieve these objectives, and the evaluation procedures for university classroom instruction. As the planning accrues, team members learn from each other. Together, the team plans teaching strategies to the large group of students, small group and committee endeavors, as well as to assist learners in individual study. Individual differences and needs must be categorized and guidance provided for optimal student achievement. More than one mind is better than one mind in delivering instruction, using the best thinking possible. Built in inservice education is available to instructors as team members work together in learning from each other in the instructional arena.

Eighth, clinical teaching may be stressed in which an instructor writes specific objectives for students to attain in a lesson. A colleague

assesses the quality of each objective with the involved instructor. The instructor teaches the lesson with the colleague observing. An assessment session follows in which the instructor and the colleague go over student evaluation test results to notice which objectives have/have not been attained by students in class. Those objectives not attained by students may need a different cooperatively planned set of learning opportunities to achieve stated objectives (Ediger, 2000, 503-505).

Roles may then be reversed whereby the colleague becomes the instructor and the instructor becomes the colleague. Cooperative planning of objectives, learning opportunities, and assessment procedures need to be forthcoming in teaching a specific lesson to university students. Result from the students involving instruction need to be reviewed. Reteaching is necessary for the unattained student objectives.

Ninth, a planned series of meetings need to be held involving all members of a department or division in the university school of education. Each meeting has a carefully planned agenda. The ensuing topic needs to be clearly defined with specific objectives emphasized. The overall goal of these meetings is to improve instruction. Ideas discussed and agreed upon may be tried out in the classroom. Results from the new approach emphasized in a classroom should be reported as concisely as possible to committee members. The worth of each procedure of instruction should be shared in an atmosphere of respect for all. Each participant needs to be accepted with no put downs involved. Democratic procedures must be the lot of committee meetings. Working harmoniously together should be a major objective. Too frequently, poor instruction has emphasized human relations which leave much to be desired. There has been hostility among faculty, between faculty and administrators, between the instructor and students, among instructors and the division secretary, as well as among students. Working toward better human relations are musts on the university levels of instruction and operation (Ediger, 1999, 233-240).

Tenth, a community of learners should be stressed. The community of learners concept will be discussed next as a separate subtopic.

A Community of Learners on the Higher Education Level

A community of learners is necessary in order to develop a quality curriculum. A community indicates unity of persons in achieving excellence. Study, thought, problem solving, critical and creative thinking, as well as deliberation are necessary to develop quality objectives, learning opportunities, and assessment procedures. Team efforts are needed. Working together is important. Harmony in attitudes, values, and beliefs is needed. That harmony involves contributions from all involved in improving the higher education curriculum. Respect for

the thinking of others is necessary as well as acceptance of others. Democracy as a way of life needs to prevail. Democratic thought emphasizes the contributions from all who will be affected by decisions made. All need to participate and no one dominate. Ideas need to circulate within the diverse groups and within the whole. With respect for content presented, there is a free flow of uninterrupted ideas. Ideas presented need ample assessment and evaluation. That which passes the test may provide opportunities for acceptance or further assessment. There are no absolutes, but opportunities for growth, learning, and achievement by participants. Reflection and inquiry are two vital concepts of democratic living and behavior.

Joint efforts between pubic schools and universities is important and a key idea in professional development schools (PDS). The National Council for the Accreditations of Teacher education (NCATE) is a strong advocate of PDS. Thus, there needs to be collaboration between the two levels of instruction in an equitable way, not a top/down procedure. The public schools and the university level of teacher education/preparation need to collaborate to work for the best teacher education program possible. Prospective teachers need input from both the pubic schools and higher education. By working together public school teachers and university professors of education may harmonize efforts to develop a PDS.

NCATE (1997) published standards for developing professional development schools. The following are excerpts from their publication:

"A PDS is characterized by joint work between and among school and university faculty directed at implementing the mission. Responsibility for learning is shared; research is jointly defined and implemented; all participants share expertise in the interests of children's and adult's learning (NCATE, 1997, 13).

"The PDS is accountable to the public and to the profession for upholding professional standards for teaching and leaning and for preparing new teachers in accordance with these standards" (NCATE, 1997, 14).

"The PDS uses processes and allocates resources and time to systematize the continuous improvement of learning to teach, teaching, learning, and organizational life" (NCATE 1997, 16).

"A PDS is characterized by norms and practices which support equity and learning for all students and adults" (NCATE 1997, 18).

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